



SEXUALITY AND HUMANITY: HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE IN THE COLOMBIAN LGBT MOVEMENT



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BACKGROUND

The **LGBT** (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community across the world has made significant strides towards a fuller realization of the rights of its members in recent years.

The **global LGBT rights movement** began in Western Europe during the 1800's, where queer people enjoyed minimal forms of citizenship, such as decriminalized homosexuality. This movement expanded to other parts of the globe rapidly after the Stonewall Riots in New York City during the summer of 1969. Since 1970, Gay Pride Marches have flourished across multiple continents and important advances have been made in the legal, social, and cultural realms with regard to LGBT acceptance and inclusion.

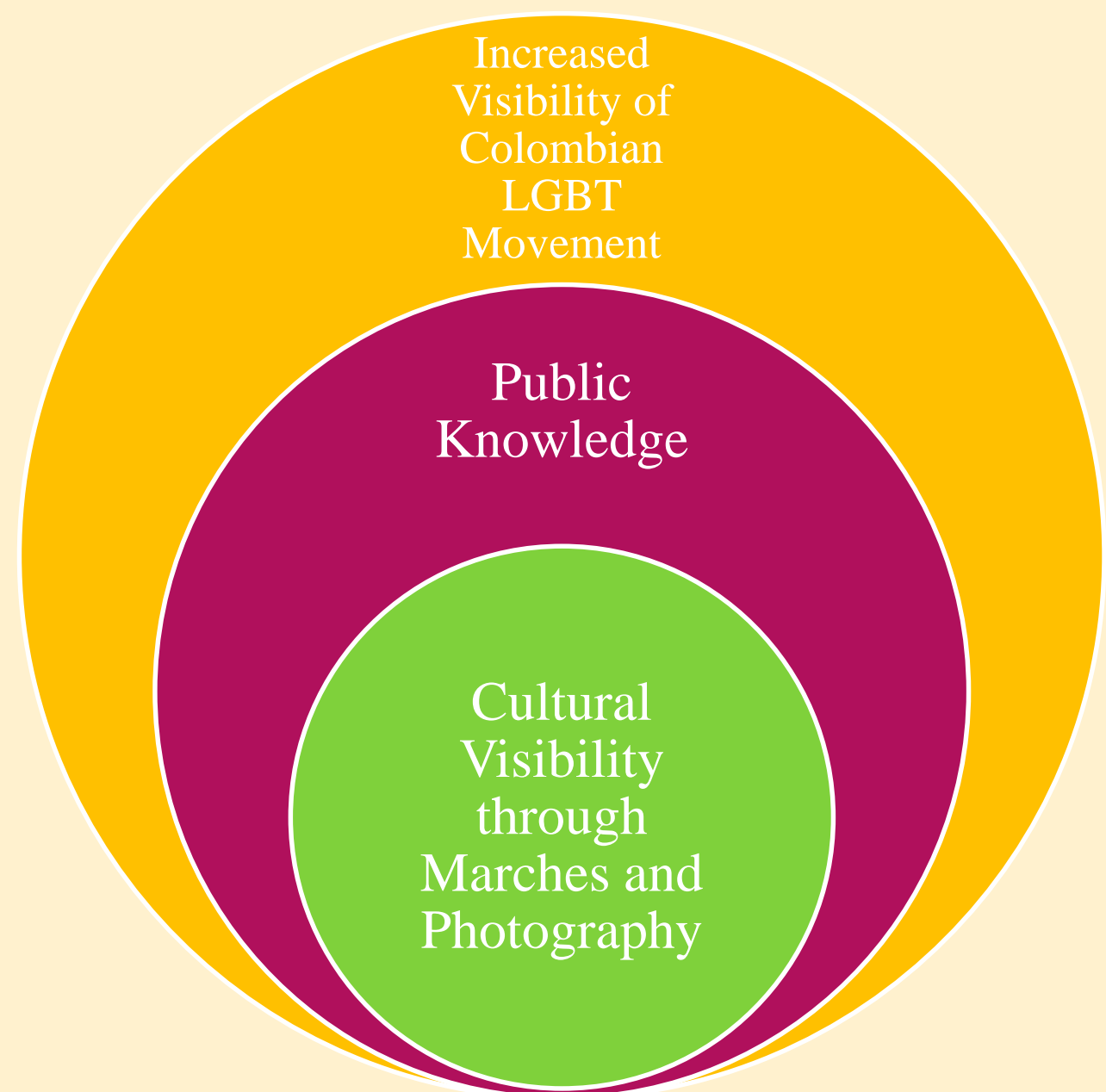
Latin America is currently at the recent forefront of this international struggle, with significant advances made in the past 20 years. Two patterns are noticeable across this region:

1. Substantial legal and cultural differences **between countries**
2. A paradox between legal and cultural realities **across all countries**

Colombia, one of the most advanced countries in terms of legal and social recognition of LGBT people, reflects this paradox between law and reality in the wake of a 50-year internal armed conflict. LGBT activist organizations such as Colombia Diversa are working to facilitate social change through the creation of positive cultural visibility of LGBT people. This cultural visibility has more complicated implications than many people consider at first glance.

PURPOSE

The **purpose of this research** is to further facilitate the visibility of the modern Colombian LGBT rights movement in two ways: increasing public knowledge and analyzing the complexities of elements involved in creating positive cultural perceptions of the LGBT community through pride marches and photographs.



This exploration serves to further public discussion of the cultural elements at play in the current efforts to “bridge the gap” between law and cultural reality in Colombia, with the hope to apply insights to other contexts as well. It is a starting point for a larger discussion about cultural strategy of LGBT movements.

ANALYSIS

Pride Marches in Bogota

The first Gay Pride March in Bogota took place in 1982 with 32 participants. Today, the annual parades draw over 40,000 people and serve as a cultural symbol of LGBT visibility in Colombian society. Various elements of the Pride March experience are important to its interpretation:

1. **Language** used in annual slogans of the March
 - 2014 → “For a culture of peace”
 - 2015 → “Colombia free of prejudice”
 - 2016 → “Peace in equality”
 - 2017 → Secular State, free beings”
2. **Text** used on signs, T-shirts, and flags
3. **Other elements** of the experience → vibrant colors, extravagant costumes, loud music and cheering

Photographs of Pride Marches Disseminated Online

LGBT-friendly publications such as *Sentido* share photographs of each yearly march online, both with and without written captions to accompany them. These photos capture many elements of the actual Pride March experience but present them from a more distant viewpoint. They also reflect the necessity of a written text to accompany a visual representation in order to harness more control over how the public interprets what they are seeing in these photographs.

Appropriation of Human Rights Discourse?

Elements of both the Pride Marches themselves and photographs depicting them suggest the discursive appropriation of international human rights norms in the Colombian LGBT narrative. This appropriation presents both advantages and disadvantages in facilitating the necessary cultural change to fully realize the human rights of LGBT people.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Powerful tool for marginalized groups to demand voice and space- Invites support from international human rights organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Imposition of Eurocentric/ “Western” values amid cultural relativism- Reinforces construction of the excluded “other”- Can be met with uncertainty and suspicion



The Colombian Paradox

According Julieta Lemaitre Ripoll, Colombia is “a country that produces luminous jurisprudence but simultaneously is terrorized by violence and bloodshed” (73). While the Constitutional Court has made a series of groundbreaking decisions over the past decade granting same-sex couples myriad rights, such as pension, social security, conjugal visits in prisons, and marriage equality, the lived reality of LGBT people in Colombia does not reflect what is written on paper. LGBT individuals are victimized by physical attacks, insults, employment discrimination, police abuse, public humiliation, threats, and a dehumanizing environment in many cases, especially in the context of armed conflict.

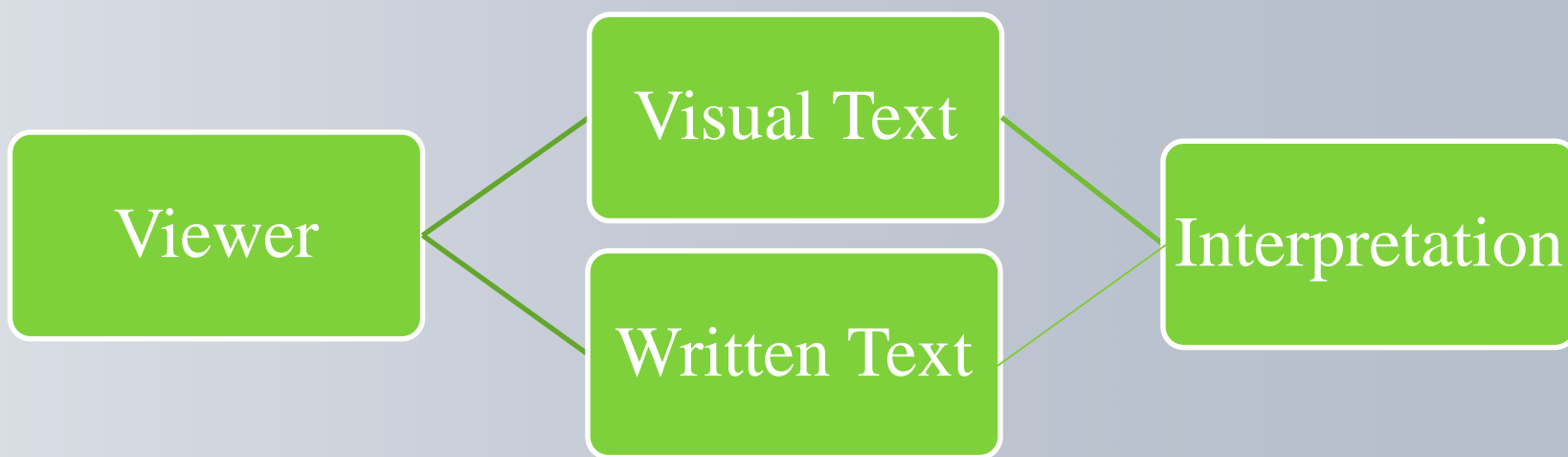
DISCUSSION

A More Nuanced Perception of Efforts in Cultural Visibility

The analysis here implies that marches and photos are not enough – written language is necessary to intersect the dynamic between vision and interpretation of cultural interventions to increase queer visibility.



Photo of the 2016 March. (Colombia Diversa)



CONCLUSIONS

Results from this research point to a few key insights and considerations for the future of the Colombian LGBT movement:

- Necessity of **positive visibility** of LGBT community in cultural change
- Importance of **written text** to intercept dynamic between vision and interpretation
- Significance of **public discussion** that meets the cultural reality of individual communities
- Relevance of visibility in academic setting
- Further research → explore more deeply the implications of **different types of narratives** used to create cultural visibility

REFERENCES

1. Lemaitre Ripoll, Julieta. “Love in the Time of Cholera: LGBT Rights in Colombia.” *Sur- International Journal on Human Rights*, vol. 6, no. 11, 2009, pp. 73-89.
2. <http://colombiadiversa.org/>
3. <https://sentiido.com/tag/marcha-del-orgullo-gay/>

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